Position Logic

Patterns of Power · The Method

The Method Beneath the Volumes, Stated in the Order It Is Actually Used: That a Human Being Decides by What He Takes as Benefit Against What He Takes as Cost; That to Know His Benefit You Must Know What He Values, and a Cost Binds Him Only Where He Is Held to It or Believes He Will Be; That in Real Time This Is Hard, So Formation Becomes the Analyst's Best First Reading of the Values and Accountability the Test of the Cost; That a Durable Hierarchy's Great Advantage Is to Set Both Dials Early; That People in Like Positions Converge Without Any Class-Mind, as Civilisations With No Possible Contact Converged on the Same Architecture; and That, Because the Decider Is Human and Can Change, This Is Not a Tidy Theory but a Way of Judging Actions — Held, Like Everything Here, as Tested, Not Revealed

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Preface

This paper is unlike the volumes it stands among: it is not a case study but the statement of the method that has run beneath all of them — used on every page of this project, and here set down plainly so that it too can be argued with. It is a full rewrite of earlier and more convoluted statements; the idea itself is simple, and the point of this version is to let the simplicity show, and to state it in the order it is actually used.

The simplicity begins with a refusal. Almost every grand account of human events explains them by removing the human — a providence directing from above, a History marching to a destination, a spirit of the age moving through a people, an invisible hand or a class-mind doing the deciding while the actual people serve as its medium. The wager of the method is that you never need such an agent above people's heads, because you cannot take the human out of human civilisation: everything in it is done by human beings, one at a time, each deciding from where he stands, by what he takes as benefit against what he takes as cost. The engine is economic only in that grammar of weighing — not in the thin sense that people want money; benefit is whatever formation installed, and very often not material at all.

Two caveats turn the sentence into an instrument: benefit is indexed to what the person was formed to value, and a cost binds him only where a credible power will enforce it and he believes it. The order of this version follows the order of use. Because in real time both caveats are hard to read, the method reaches first for formation — the analyst's best estimate of the values, and, turned toward politics, a durable hierarchy's greatest advantage, which sets the benefit dial in childhood and holds the violence and the community that set the cost dial too. It tests, second, whether a cost is real. It reads, third, the record of others in like positions — and

here the cleanest evidence is the civilisations that could not possibly have touched and converged on the same architecture anyway, proof that the convergence which looks like a conscious class needs no shared mind, though where a channel exists the convergence does cash out as real coordination. It handles the apex by the same procedure, and the deviation as a finding. And because the decider is human, values can change, which is the escape from determinism and the reason the method is a baseline and not a cage. The close states the discipline that guards the instrument against its own flexibility, and what the method is for: not a tidy theory that has solved its subject, but a way of judging actions, by which a position once seen makes even the most terrible act legible. It is held, like everything here, as tested, not revealed.

A Note on This Collaboration

The method, and its name, are Thomas J. Bryan's, and so is the order in which this version states it. He supplied the governing wager — that you cannot take the human out of human civilisation, that every account reaching for providence or History or the spirit of the age or impersonal economic forces smuggles an agent above people's heads to do what only people do, and that the sufficient unit is a single human being, unchanged across the span of civilisation, deciding by benefit against cost with the materials at hand. He insisted the engine is economic only in its grammar and never in its anthropology; and he set the sequence this rewrite follows: the bedrock of value and credited cost; formation as the real-time reading of the values and as the hierarchy's great advantage; the convergence that is not class consciousness, shown by civilisations with no possible contact and by the post-war fascist movements where convergence travels a real channel into real coordination; the apex read by position and value in Henry, in Stalin, and in the deviation of Césaire; and the changeability of values that keeps the method a baseline and not a cage.

The articulation, the ordering, and the documentary labour are Claude's (Anthropic), developed in the same dialogue: the verification of Lenin's formulation in 'What Is to Be Done?', of Henry's two problems and their single solution, of the Moscow trials and of Césaire's choice; the reconstruction of the no-contact convergences — Diocletian and Tokugawa Ieyasu, the Holy Roman Empire and the Classic Maya — from the project's comparative volumes; the Cambodian case, in which a thesis defended in Paris became, years later, the logic of the Killing Fields; and the discipline against imputing values after the outcome. His is the architecture and the eye for the pattern; mine is the documentary labour and the composition. Neither half would produce the work alone. It is held, as everything is held, as tested — never revealed.

I. THE HUMAN AT THE CENTRE

The wager beneath the method: that you cannot take the human out of human civilisation; that every grand account which tries — providence, History, the spirit of the age, the invisible hand,

the class-mind — smuggles an agent above people's heads to do what only people do; and that the unit which needs none of them is a single animal, its mind unchanged across the span of civilisation, deciding by benefit against cost — economic in its grammar of weighing, never in its anthropology

You Cannot Take the Human Out

Almost every grand account of human events removes the human from them. Providence has God directing the course of things from above; the philosophy of history has History itself marching toward a destination, with persons as its footmen; the cultivated speak of the spirit of the age moving through a people, as though an age had a mind; the economists have the invisible hand, or market forces, or simply the economy, doing this and intending that, as if the phrase named an agent rather than the sum of a great many separate choices; and the Marxist has the means of production writing the script of consciousness and a class acting as a single will. These pictures differ enormously in content and in politics, and their quarrels fill libraries. But beneath the quarrels they share one move, and it is the move this method exists to refuse: each posits an agent above the heads of the actual people — a force, a will, a logic, a destiny — that does the real deciding, and demotes the human beings below it to the medium through which the higher thing works its purpose.

The wager of this method is that you never need such an agent, and that reaching for one is the standing temptation to be resisted, because it explains a human world by subtracting the only thing in it that decides. You cannot take the human out of human civilisation. Everything that happens in it — the cathedral and the purge, the tax revolt and the dynasty, the slow consolidation and the sudden collapse — is done by human beings, one at a time, each deciding what to do from where he stands. The great patterns are real, and the project spends most of its pages tracing them; but a pattern is not an agent. It is what a multitude of separate human decisions adds up to when the picture is seen from far enough away, and the distance is the only thing that ever made it look like fate. Bring the lens back down to where the deciding happens and there is no spirit of the age in the room — only a person, in a position, weighing what he takes as benefit against what he takes as cost, and choosing.

The Animal That Has Not Changed

The unit is a single human being, and the same human being everywhere. The mind reading this sentence is, in its architecture, the mind that raised the first walls, that argued in the assembly, that knelt in the parish church and took up the stone against the violator; for every purpose that matters to the study of power the species has been cognitively the same across the whole span of recorded civilisation, on the order of tens of thousands of years. The exact dating of when the mind reached its present shape is for specialists and is properly contested, and the load-bearing point survives all of it: no biological change in the human animal has done, or could have done, the explanatory work that providence and History and the spirit of the age are invoked to do. The mind that built civilisation is the mind that lives inside it now.

From this one premise the first discipline follows, and it is severe. The method grants one and the same psychology to everyone: the king and the commissar and the ploughman and the bishop all run the identical engine, and the vast differences in what they do flow not from different kinds of mind but from different positions and different values poured into the same machine. This forbids the lazy exits by which analysis escapes the labour of understanding — that the tyrant was a monster, the mob mad, the believer a fool, the foreigner simply other — because each of those ends the inquiry exactly where it should begin, and sends the analyst back, every time, to the only two questions that explain conduct: what did this person value, and what could it cost him.

Economic in Grammar, Not in Anthropology

One misreading must be headed off at once, because the engine is built of cost and benefit and that vocabulary already has an owner in most readers' minds. The method is economic in one exact sense and in no other. It is economic in its grammar: a person weighs what he takes to be the benefit of a course against what he takes to be its cost, and acts on the balance. It is emphatically not economic in the usual sense — it does not hold that what people want is money, nor that conduct is driven in the last instance by the means of production, nor that a material base secretly authors the beliefs sitting on top of it. That doctrine is economism, and the method parts from it deliberately, because the benefit a person actually pursues is whatever his formation taught him to value, and that is very often not material at all. It is salvation, or honour, or the safety of his children, or the purity of a doctrine, or the good opinion of the people whose regard he was raised to need.

The miser and the martyr run the identical engine; they differ only in what sits in the benefit column, and the difference was put there by formation, not by nature. To call the martyr irrational because he will not take the money is simply to mistake the contents of one's own benefit column for the structure of the human mind. The method makes no such mistake. It borrows the economist's spare grammar of weighing and refuses his thin anthropology of the money-maximising man; and in the same motion it parts from the Marxist, with whom it shares the instinct that material position shapes conduct, but from whom it keeps the human chooser and discards the two things that would take the human out — the base that determines the mind, and the class that thinks as one.

II. THE MECHANISM, STATED PLAINLY

The whole of the method in a sentence — a person in a position decides with the materials at hand, weighing benefit against cost — and the two caveats that turn the sentence from a slogan into an instrument: that to know his benefit you must know what he values, and that a cost binds him only where he is held to it, or believes credibly that he will be

A Person in a Position

A human being occupies a position in a structure. The position lays before him a set of possible actions, a set of circumstances simply there in front of him, and the materials at hand; and he chooses by weighing what he takes to be the benefit against what he takes to be the cost. That is the entire engine. There are no laws of history acting over anyone's head, no spirit of the age, no economic forces moving as agents, no class-mind descending upon a million people — only persons, in positions, deciding with what their positions put within reach. The phrase *with the materials at hand* is not decoration: a person does not choose from the set of all conceivable actions but from the far narrower set his position actually presents, with the tools, the information, the allies, and the precedents his moment happens to supply — which is why the same problem yields a different-looking solution in two different centuries, and why the convergences traced later are convergences of shape and never of detail.

The Two Caveats

Two caveats turn the sentence into an instrument rather than a tautology, and they are the whole of what must be filled in before the engine can turn. The first is that benefit is not given in the world; it depends entirely on what the person values — and so to know what will count to a man as a benefit, you must first know what he values. The second is that cost is not given either; a possible cost weighs upon a decision only when the actor is actually held to it, or believes credibly that he will be and takes the threat as real. A cost no one will impose is no cost at all, and weighs nothing; and a cost that is real but that the actor does not believe in weighs nothing either, until he is taught otherwise. These two — a value on the benefit side, a credited accountability on the cost side — are the slack in the system, the place where the human enters, and they are why two people in the identical position are not interchangeable parts: the same seat yields opposite conduct in two men who value different things, and the same act costs one man everything and the other nothing, depending only on who can reach him and whether he knows it.

And here is the honest difficulty the method must own before it claims anything: in real time, both caveats are hard to read. Watching a living person decide, you do not have direct access to what he values, and you cannot always tell whether the cost that ought to restrain him will in fact be imposed or believed. This is the central problem of judging people as they act rather than after the fact, and the next three parts are, in effect, the three things that make the reading possible — formation, which gives the best first estimate of the values; accountability, which tests whether the cost is real; and the study of others in like positions, which shows what people so placed have tended to decide.

III. FORMATION, AND THE FIRST READING OF THE VALUES

Why, since values cannot be seen directly, the analyst's best first reading of them is a person's formation — the values installed before they could be weighed; and why this same fact is a durable hierarchy's greatest political advantage, because to form a child is to set the benefit dial early, and to hold the violence and the community is to set the cost dial too

Where the Values Come From

If benefit is indexed to what a person values, and values cannot be read off a face in real time, then the analyst needs a source for them, and the best one is formation. Values are installed — by family, by community, by the institutions a person is born among — before the person is in any position to weigh them, and they arrive not as proposals to be assessed but as the very standard by which all later proposals will be assessed. This is why, lacking the historian's luxury of inferring a man's values backward from how things turned out, the student of a living situation reaches first for formation: knowing how a person was raised, in what creed and what class and what account of the world, gives the most reliable first estimate available of what now sits in his benefit column, and therefore of how he will weigh what his position sets before him. It is an estimate and not a certainty — a later part will show that values change — but it is the strongest starting point the method has, and in real time a strong starting point is most of the battle.

The Hierarchy's Great Advantage

Turn the same fact toward politics and it becomes the deepest mechanism of rule. A durable hierarchy holds an enormous advantage if it can get to a person in childhood, because then it sets both dials at the source. It installs the values — and the values a hierarchy installs tend, unsurprisingly, to coincide with the interests of those at its head, so that the population grows up wanting what keeps the arrangement standing and recoiling from what would bring it down. And it holds the means to set the cost dial too: the monopoly of violence in the hands of the state, and, working beside it and often reaching further, the community that praises the conforming and shames, denounces, and casts out the deviant. The two enforcers together — the sword that can punish the body and the neighbours who can withdraw the regard a person was raised to need — fill the cost column early and keep it full. Take Christendom for the model: the child baptised before he can consent, the parish at the centre of the world, the calendar and the rites and the very meaning of a good person and of who is rightfully in authority all delivered as simply the way things are, by the only authorities he has known, and kept warm thereafter by the approval and contempt of everyone around him, with the Church's sanctions and the prince's law standing behind the whole. An apex that must compel every act by force is poor and brittle; an apex that formed its people rules cheaply, because the people now enforce the arrangement on themselves. This is why formation is the quiet centre of the apparatus of rule — it is the one power that fills the benefit column of millions at once, early, from the inside, and for free — and it is also, for the same reason, very hard to break from. But it is not a cage, and the

reading it gives is a baseline and not a verdict; the seventh part returns to what happens when it breaks.

IV. WHEN A COST IS REAL

The second caveat opened: that a cost deters only where a credible power will enforce it and the actor believes it; that this, and nothing more occult, is what a counterweight is; and that where no power keeps the account, the cost column stands empty and the strong simply do as they please

A Cost No One Will Impose Is Not a Cost

The cost side carries its own caveat, the mirror of the first, and in real time it is the second thing the analyst must test. A possible cost bears on a decision only to the degree that someone is credibly keeping account and will actually make the actor pay — and that the actor believes it. The law one will never be charged under, the rule that is never enforced, the threat from a power too weak or too distant to reach you, the sanction a man has convinced himself will never fall on him: all of these enter the calculation at very nearly zero, however grave they appear on paper. This is why the identical deed is cheap for one actor and ruinous for another — not because the deed differs, but because the enforcer can reach the one and not the other, and the one knows it. To judge whether a person will be restrained, then, you do not ask whether a rule exists; you ask whether a power both able and willing to enforce it stands over him, and whether he reckons that it does.

The Counterweight and the Empty Column

From this the project's whole account of plurality falls out as simple arithmetic. A counterweight is nothing more mysterious than institutionalised credible cost — a court, a free press, a rival power, an independent class, each positioned and strong enough that the apex knows defiance will in fact be made to hurt. Where such counterweights exist and are credible, the apex's cost column is filled and its conduct moderates — not because the apex has grown virtuous but because its choices are now priced. Where the counterweights are absent, captured, or cowed into hollowness, the column stands empty and the apex does as it pleases, again not from new wickedness but because nothing is any longer pricing what it does. The dial of restraint turns with the credibility of the check and not with its mere existence, which is why a constitution full of guarantees restrains nothing if no power will enforce them, and a single genuinely independent institution restrains more than a hundred paper ones. Foreclosure, in the project's vocabulary, is just this: the apex's calculation performed with an empty cost column. And liberty is its companion — it widens not when the powerful are persuaded to be good but when the governed acquire counterweights that put real costs into the column the powerful must read, and it narrows the moment those counterweights are bought, broken, or allowed to ossify into paper.

V. CONVERGENCE, NOT A CONSCIOUS CLASS

How a pattern that looks for all the world like a class acting with one mind is produced by nothing more than many people in like positions running the same calculation; why civilisations that could not possibly have touched converged on the same architecture, which is the cleanest proof the convergence needs no shared consciousness; why coordination is nonetheless real wherever a channel exists; and how an institution comes to think without thinkers

The Industrialist and the Worker

The third thing that makes a real-time reading possible is the record of others who stood where this actor stands, because people in like positions tend to decide alike, and watching how the like-positioned have decided tells you what this one is likely to do. Consider first the thing that most tempts the eye toward a hidden collective mind. An industrialist knows his bottom line, and when something threatens it — a tax, a regulation, a union drive — he notices, sharply and at once. And every other industrialist, occupying the same position, notices the same threat at the same moment, with no message needing to pass between them; each goes looking for a solution, and because their positions are identical their solutions converge; and having converged, they then do coordinate — they fund the same lobby, back the same candidates, press for the same law, move to crush the same opposition. Seen from outside this is indistinguishable from a conscious class acting in concert, and it is not one. No collective mind formed, and none was needed. The convergence came from the shared position, and the coordination came from the convergence. The worker is the same mechanism on the other side of the floor: he knows his paycheck, and when inflation eats it or the layoff comes or the tax rises, he notices, and so does every man in his position, and they too look for solutions and converge upon them and combine to press for them. Two coalitions, opposed across the floor, neither a conscious class — only two crowds each reading the same position the same way.

Lenin’s Mistake

Here is the proof that what looks like consciousness is only position read correctly. Lenin looked at the worker and was disappointed in him. The working class, he complained, left to its own efforts, could rise only to what he called trade-union consciousness — the wish to combine, to fight the employer, to win better wages and hours and conditions — and genuine revolutionary consciousness would have to be brought to it from outside, by a vanguard of professional revolutionaries. But the worker was not failing at consciousness; he was reading his position correctly. From where he actually stood, the real benefit was the better wage and the safer shift and the shorter day — the concrete improvement of the life he was living — not the distant abstraction of seizing the state, whose promised benefits were speculative and remote while its costs, under the Tsar’s police, were immediate and severe. The worker who wanted a raise rather than a revolution was weighing his position’s benefits and costs exactly as the method says he would. Lenin mistook sound position-logic for a deficiency of mind, and was driven to

posit an external party precisely because the workers' own positions would not recommend the conduct his theory required of them. The method needs no such posit; it reads the worker's "mere" trade-union consciousness as precisely what a man in that position ought to want.

The Experiment Civilisations Ran Without Meaning To

The everyday cases establish that convergence can mimic a class, but they leave a gap a sceptic can stand in, because the industrialists share a country and a century and might be converging by quiet communication rather than by position alone. To close the gap one needs cases where no channel of any kind connected the actors — where they could not have copied or coordinated or shared a mind — and where they converged regardless. History has run that experiment many times without meaning to, and the project's comparative volumes are built on it. Take the starkest pairing. When Diocletian took the Roman purple in 284 and set about rebuilding an order shattered by half a century of soldier-emperors, and when Tokugawa Ieyasu surveyed Japan from the field of Sekigahara in 1600 and set about the same task after a century of civil war, the two were separated by thirteen centuries and the breadth of Eurasia and could not so much as have heard the other's name. Yet each, from the identical position — a strongman who has won the field and must now convert a victory that dies with him into an order that does not — reached for the same instruments: a new legitimating story, a body of law to regulate the very rivals who might do to him what he had done to his predecessor, an administrative balance that held the regions close without letting any one swell into a challenger. Each even made the same counter-intuitive move of stepping back from the supreme office while keeping the power behind it — Diocletian abdicating in 305, the first Roman emperor to do so by choice; Ieyasu retiring the shogunate to his son in 1605 and ruling on from Sunpu as the cloistered power — each for the same reason read off the same position: an order built on one man's person dies with the person, and the surest proof that an institution will outlive its founder is to step back and let it run while you still live to correct it. No wire connected Nicomedia to Edo. What is left, when diffusion and coordination and shared mind are all excluded, is the position, and the human animal reading it the same way in two ages because it was the same animal facing the same problem.

The same experiment runs in space between the Holy Roman Empire and the Classic Maya — constellations of sacred, decentralised polities raised on opposite shores of an ocean neither knew it could cross, sharing no religion, no script, not even the wheel, and converging nonetheless on the same architecture: a divinely sanctioned ruler whose supreme legitimacy ran alongside a deliberately limited reach, a fragmentation that kept any rival from gathering enough to overturn the whole, an interpreter class of clergy or of scribes holding the sacred knowledge that bound it together, and extraction framed as cosmic duty rather than naked levy. The Empire held this shape, in round figures, from 962 to 1806; the Maya theirs from roughly 250 to 900; both outlasting most of the centralised empires that looked, at any moment, far stronger.

Now the caution that keeps this honest, for it is the project's standing discipline and not a hedge bolted on at the end. These cases were chosen because they converged, and one must not read them as a law that the same conditions always produce the same polity, for they plainly do not — the record is full of fragmented, hemmed-in societies that never built the sacred-decentralised form, and of the roads not taken. The claim is the careful one: that when a configuration of problems recurs, people in like positions *tend*, not must, to converge on like solutions, and that the convergence is evidence the solution was reached from the position rather than carried along a wire — because here there was no wire. And the signature that seals it is that the solutions are similar but never identical, the one thing neither rival explanation predicts: had it come by diffusion one would expect copying with a traceable lineage, and had it come from a single class-mind or a single optimiser one would expect convergence upon one best answer; instead one finds the same skeleton in different flesh — Diocletian rejecting heredity and building selection by merit, Ieyasu embracing heredity and building councils to carry the state through a weak heir — opposite mechanisms serving the identical end, because each solved the same problem with the materials his own world had put in his hands. The divergence is not noise to be apologised for; it is the fingerprint of independent solution, the proof that no one copied and no one coordinated, only many human beings, in like positions, each deciding for himself.

Where the Wire Exists, Coordination Is Real

It would be the opposite error — the mirror of the class-mind it corrects — to take any of this as a denial that elites coordinate. They plainly do, and the point is only about sequence. Where a channel does exist, the convergence cashes out as real coordination, and the project's study of the post-war fascist movements shows it without flinching: industrialists, landowners, officers, and frightened middle classes across several countries, each facing a democratic majority and an organised left that threatened property and standing, converged first upon the same reading of their position — the threat is mortal, the parliamentary road will not stop it — and then, where they could reach one another, genuinely combined, funding the same movements, backing the same strongmen, building the same networks to constrain what an electorate could do to a balance sheet. One solution that had appeared in the air of the age — call it by its name, fascism — was seized upon precisely because it answered the position so many of them shared. That is coordination, and it is not imaginary; there were deals, subsidies, devious and deliberate men. But the convergence came first and the coordination second: the combination was assembled out of already-aligned interests, not handed down by a class that thought as one before its members ever did. This is why such coalitions behave as coalitions and not as a mind — they hold while the interests align and dissolve the instant they diverge, allies turning on one another the moment a shifted position reprices the alliance, which a true collective consciousness could never do. So the two tiers fit into one finding: the no-contact cases prove the convergence needs no wire, and the fascist case shows that where a wire is present the convergence simply travels along it into coordination. Coordination is real throughout; what dissolves under the analysis is only the special substance called class consciousness — the supposed group mind deciding above its members' heads — which turns out, every time one

looks closely, to be many people in one position reading it the same way and then, where they can, shaking hands on it.

How a Position Outlives the Man

Add one slower mechanism and the last appearance of a guiding mind dissolves. Institutions select. They hire, promote, and retain the people whose instincts fit what the position rewards, and quietly shed the rest — each decision local and defensible, about this candidate and that promotion, the sum being that over time the institution comes to be staffed by people who embody its logic without ever having had to calculate it. The position comes to think without thinkers. The founder is outlived by the creature he shaped; the regulator drifts, appointment by unremarkable appointment, into the service of the industry it was raised to check; the good man admitted because he fitted is gently extruded the day his conscience exceeds the position's tolerances — and no traitor appears anywhere, only a filter doing what filters do. This is why staffing a captured institution with better people fails, and why the operator who would corrupt one need not corrupt its members at all: he need only seize the filter, and wait.

VI. READING THE APEX

Henry and Stalin

The apex is harder to read than the worker, because his position is singular and his inner valuing concealed; but the procedure does not change, and it is just as much an instrument for looking back into history as for reading a living situation. Turned upon the past, position logic is a lens for deciphering what was actually happening — set against the hagiography, the official chronicle, and the self-serving memoir, each of which was written to tell you what to believe about a reign rather than what drove it. Looked at through the lens, the famous reigns stop being either the heroic or the monstrous portraits the record has handed down and become legible as positions worked. Take Henry the Eighth. Fix the position: a king who needs a male heir, because a contested succession means the return of a civil war his realm remembers too well, and a king badly short of money. He needs an annulment Rome will not grant, and he needs revenue. From that position a single move answers both pressures at once — break from Rome, take the headship of the church in England into his own hands, free his marriage and seize the wealth of the monasteries in one stroke. The decision an idle eye reads as a convulsion of lust or conscience reads, from the position, as the obvious solution to two standing problems; and the only real question remaining is the cost — whether the Emperor Charles, nephew to the queen being set aside, could and would punish him, and whether his own Catholic subjects would rise. He judged the cost bearable, and acted. Or take Stalin, holding the machinery of the party after Lenin's death. Suppose, from the evidence of his conduct before the fact, that his governing value is the keeping of personal power. His position then presents two standing threats: rivals among the old Bolsheviks who hold more of the revolutionary legitimacy this new order prizes than he can claim, and the awkward standing need to justify why a vanguard dictatorship promised to wither has not withered. One instrument

answers both — turn the criminal-justice apparatus upon the old revolutionaries, try them as counter-revolutionary wreckers and traitors, and in the same act destroy the more-legitimate rivals and manufacture the ever-present internal enemy whose existence justifies the vanguard's permanence. The show trials, monstrous as a moral fact and held here with that gravity, are from the position a single efficient solution to two problems at once.

With the lens turned upon the past on an act that looks like pure insanity, and you can see the logic of it (although the logic was flawed). In 1959 a Cambodian student named Khieu Samphan was awarded a doctorate by the University of Paris for a thesis, "Cambodia's Economy and Industrial Development", which argued that the bankers and merchants and bureaucrats of his country's cities produced nothing and merely parasitised the real value made by those who worked the land — a thesis examined, approved, and credentialed by one of the foremost universities in the world. Years later, in power, the movement he served and helped to lead enacted exactly that proposition with total logical consistency: it emptied the cities at gunpoint, abolished money and markets and schools, drove the whole population onto the land, and in the four years that followed something on the order of a quarter of Cambodia died, the figure contested and held here in its full and terrible range. Look at the Killing Fields from outside and they are unintelligible, a pure eruption of cruelty and madness. Fix the man's position and they become terribly legible. He had been formed, fully and sincerely, in a doctrine — that the apparatus of the city is a parasite, that a rational and virtuous people waits beneath it, that terror is the instrument of virtue — and from inside that formation the emptying of the cities was not madness but the rigorous application of a theory, an academically honoured theory, that he believed would free his people from imperial and capitalist exploitation. The horror is not explained away by this; it is held with its full weight, and the men are not excused. But it is made legible, and legibility is the whole of what the method promises. It shows, too, the thing the lens most needs the reader to see: that catastrophe on this scale does not require monsters of a special kind, but ordinary, educated, credentialed people, working out the logic of a position and a formation to its end. Understanding the position does not pardon the act; it only lets you see, where others see only madness, the human logic that ran to the monstrous end — which is the necessary first step toward seeing where such a logic must be stopped. Debug, do not defend. The great patterns this project calls the shape of power are only what ordinary human beings, standing in positions, deciding by what they were formed to value and by what they can credibly be made to pay, add up to when seen from far enough away — and the distance is the only thing that ever made them look like fate. You cannot take the human out of human civilisation, and the method is the long refusal to try. Tested, not revealed.

VII. VALUES CAN CHANGE

The escape from determinism: that formation is a powerful baseline and not a cage, that people convert, and that when a person's values change his whole reckoning of benefit and cost changes with them and his conduct follows — so that in real time, with the long advantage of

formation behind you, you must still keep asking whether the values you read are the values he now holds

Formation Is a Baseline, Not a Cage

If formation fixed a person's values once and for all, the method would collapse into a determinism, and people would be the calculators it has insisted they are not. They are not calculators, and the reason, once again, is that they are human: values can change. Formation supplies a powerful baseline — what arrived first, and was kept warm by community, is genuinely hard to dislodge — but a baseline is not a destiny, and the proof stands everywhere a person comes to want what he was never raised to want. The clearest case is the convert, and among the sharpest converts is the revolutionary. The Marxists were not formed as Marxists; there was no parish of the dialectic to baptise them in the cradle. They were raised, overwhelmingly, in traditional societies and conventional faiths — and somewhere, through some collision between their position and the account they had been handed, they grew disillusioned, ceased to hold the values they had been formed in, and took on new ones: a new picture of what was right, of who was the enemy, of what a just order and a good life would be.

And the moment the values changed, the whole engine recomputed. The same man, in the same position, now weighed benefit and cost on a wholly different scale, and so acted differently — risked what he would once have guarded, scorned what he would once have pursued, valued the revolution his fathers would have died to prevent. Nothing in the mechanism altered; only the contents of the benefit column were exchanged. This is why the method reads conversion not as a mystery but as a re-setting of the dial, and why it can hold both halves of the truth at once: that formation runs deep enough to explain most conduct most of the time, and that it is not a wall, because the values it installs can be lost and others gained. For the analyst reading a living person this is the final discipline of the values side: formation gives you the baseline, but you must then ask whether the man before you still holds what he was given, or has, somewhere along the way, exchanged it — because if he has, his whole reckoning has changed with it, and the baseline you started from is now the place from which to measure how far he has moved.

VIII. THE DISCIPLINE, AND WHAT IT IS FOR

What keeps so flexible an instrument honest — read the value from evidence prior to the act, treat deviations as findings, and hold the method to its own standard; and what the method is, in the end: not a tidy theory that has solved its subject, but a way of judging actions, by which a position once seen makes the logic of even the most terrible act legible

This is not, in the end, a tidy theory that has solved its subject, and it should not be mistaken for one. Everyone wants a pretty and simple framework, a key that turns once and opens

everything, the satisfaction of having figured it all out — and that wanting is exactly what produces the agents above people's heads this method began by refusing, the History and the class-mind and the invisible hand, each of them a tidy answer purchased by subtracting the human. The method offers no such tidiness. It is simple in its mechanism and infinitely variable in its application, because it is dealing with human beings, and human beings do not all value the same thing. What it offers is not prediction but legibility: a way of judging actions such that, when you can actually see a person's position — what he was formed to value, what holds him to a cost, what his moment put in his hands — you can usually understand the logic of what he did, even when what he did was monstrous.

A Note on Sources

A statement of method still owes verification for the cases it leans on, and holds its readings as tested.

On the worker and the vanguard: V. I. Lenin, 'What Is to Be Done?' (1902), which holds that the working class, by its own effort, develops only trade-union consciousness — the drive to combine, fight the employer, and win better wages, hours, and conditions — and that revolutionary consciousness must be brought from without by a vanguard; read here not as a failure of the worker's consciousness but as the worker correctly reading the benefits and costs of his own position.

On the apex: Henry VIII's need of a male heir, against the memory of dynastic civil war, and his financial straits, answered at one stroke by the break from Rome — the Act of Supremacy (1534) and the dissolution of the monasteries (1536–1541) — the live cost being the Emperor Charles V, nephew of Catherine of Aragon, and the possibility of Catholic revolt; and Stalin's consolidation of the party after Lenin's death (1924) and the Moscow show trials of the old Bolsheviks as counter-revolutionary 'wreckers' (1936–1938), read as a single instrument answering two needs at once. On the deviation: Aimé Césaire of Martinique, whose advocacy of départementalisation (1946) and later break with the French Communist Party (1956) read as logical once his governing value is taken, from his life and words rather than the outcome, to be the welfare of his people.

On convergence without contact: the project's comparative volumes, in which actors with no possible channel between them converge on one architecture. Diocletian (acclaimed 284 CE; the first Roman emperor to abdicate voluntarily, 305) and Tokugawa Ieyasu (victorious at Sekigahara, 1600; shogun 1603; abdicating to Hidetada in 1605 and ruling on as ōgosho) reach the same post-crisis stabilisation across thirteen centuries and the breadth of Eurasia; the Holy Roman Empire (conventionally 962–1806) and the Classic Maya city-states (c. 250–900 CE) converge, across an unbridged ocean, on the same sacred, decentralised polity, the isolated

Hawaiian case standing near to a controlled proof. These are read as a tendency, not a law: the cases were chosen because they converged, and the contrary cases — the fragmented societies that never took the form — keep the claim short of determinism. On coordination where a channel exists: the project's study of the post-war fascist movements, in which industrialists, landowners, officers, and frightened middle classes across several countries converge on one reading of their position and then, where they can reach one another, genuinely combine — convergence first, coordination second.

On the Cambodian case: Khieu Samphan's 1959 doctoral thesis at the University of Paris, 'Cambodia's Economy and Industrial Development', arguing that the urban bankers, merchants, and bureaucrats were unproductive parasites on the value made by agriculture and craft — a thesis enacted years later by the movement he served, which emptied the cities, abolished money, markets, and schools, and presided over the deaths of an estimated one-and-a-half to two million people, roughly a quarter of the population, the figure contested and held here in its full range. The propagation of the revolutionary logic into Cambodia is treated at length in the project's applied study of propagation, 'The Error They Carried Home'.

The framework these cases serve — the engine of benefit and cost, the two caveats of value and credible enforcement, formation and the managed belief, convergence-without-consciousness and the coalition that is not a class, institutional selection, and the discipline of the tested against the revealed — is developed across the project's foundational papers, above all 'The Machine That Runs Itself', 'The Costume and the Body', and 'What Is to Be Done', with the laboratory work of Philip Tetlock and colleagues on sacred values standing behind the account of formation. This paper states the method those papers assume; it replaces an earlier and more convoluted version of the same statement, and is offered, like the method itself, to be argued with.